

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

Benjamin Franklin's Peace Journal *Passy, May 9, 1782*

As, since the Change of Ministry in England, some serious Professions have been made, of their Disposition to Peace, and of their Readiness to enter into a general Treaty for that Purpose; and, as the Concerns and Claims of five Nations are to be discussed in that Treaty, which must, therefore, be interesting to the present Age, and to Posterity, I am inclined to keep a Journal of the Proceedings, as far as they come to my Knowledge, and, to make it more complete, will first endeavor to recollect what has already past.

I had but just sent away. . . [a]. . . Letter, when M^r Oswald came in, bringing with him M^r Grenville, who was just arrived. . . .

I imagined the Gentlemen had been at Versailles, as I supposed M^r G: would first have waited on M^r De Vergennes before he called on me. But finding, in Conversation, that he had not, and that he expected me to introduce him, I immediately wrote to that Minister, acquainting him that

M^r G: was arrived, and desired to know when his Excellency would think fit to receive him, and I sent an Express with my Letter. I then entered into Conversation with him on the Subject of his Mission, M^r Fox having referred me to him as being fully acquainted with his Sentiments. He said that Peace was really wished for by every Body, if it could be obtained on reasonable Terms, and, as the Idea of subjugating America was given up, and both France and America had thereby obtained what they had in View, originally, it was hoped that there now remained no Obstacle to a Pacification. That England was willing to treat of a general Peace with all the Powers at War against her, and that the Treaty should be at Paris. I did not press him much for further Particulars, supposing they were reserved for our interview with M^r de Vergennes. The Gentlemen did me the Honor of staying Dinner with me, on the Supposition which I urged that my

Express might be back before we parted. This gave me an Opportunity of a good deal of general Conversation with M^r Grenville, who appeared to me a sensible, judicious, intelligent, good tempered, and well instructed young Man, answering well the Character M^r Fox had given me of him.

They left me, however abt. Six O Clock, and my Messenger did not return till near Nine. He brought me the Answer of M. le Comte de Vergennes, that he would be glad to hear of M^r Grenville's Arrival, and would be ready to receive us to Morrow at 1/2 past 10, or 11 O Clock. I immediately inclosed his Note in one to M^r Grenville, requesting him to be with me at Passy by 8, that we might have Time to breakfast, before we set out. . . .

We set out accordingly, the next Morning in my Coach from Passy, and arrived punctually at M^r de Vergennes's, who received M^r Grenville in the most cordial Manner, on Account of the Acquaintance and Friendship that had formerly subsisted between his Uncle and M^r De Vergennes, when they were Embassadors together at Constantinople. After some little agreeable conversation, M^r Grenville presented his Letters, from M^r Sec^y Fox, and, I think, from the Duke of Richmond. When these were read the Subject of Peace was entered on. What my Memory retains of the Discourse amounts to little more than this, that after mutual Declarations of the good Dispositions of the two Courts, M^r Grenville having intimated that, in Case England gave America Independence, France, it was expected, would restore the Conquests she had made of British Islands, receiving back those of Miquelon & St Pierre. And the original Object of the War being obtained, it was supposed that France would be contented with that. The Minister seemed to smile at the proposed Exchange; and remarked that the Offer of giving Independence to America, amounted to little. America, says he, does not ask it of you; there is M^r Franklin, he will answer you as to that Point. To be sure, I said, we do not consider ourselves as under any Necessity of bargaining for a Thing that is our own, which we have bought at the Expense of much Blood and Treasure, and which we are in Possession of.

As to our being satisfied with the original Object of the War, continued he, look back to the Conduct of your Nation in former Wars. In the last War, for Example, what was the Object? It was the disputed Right to some waste Lands, on the Ohio and the Frontiers of Nova Scotia; did you content yourselves with the Recovery of those Lands? No you retained at the Peace all Canada, all Louisiana, all Florida, Granada and the other West India Islands, the greatest Part of the northern Fisheries, with all your Conquests in Africa, and the East Indies. Something being mentioned of its not being reasonable that a Nation after making an and unsuccessful War upon its Neighbors, should expect to sit down whole, and have every Thing restored which she had lost in such a War, I think M^r Grenville remarked that the War had been provoked by the Encouragement given by France to the Americans to revolt. On which M^r de Vergennes grew a little warm, and declared firmly, that the breach was made and our Independence declared long before we received the least Encouragement from France, and he defied the World to give the smallest Proof of the Contrary. There sits, says he, M^r Franklin, who knows the Fact, and can contradict me if I do not speak the Truth. He repeated to M^r Grenville what he had

before said to M^r Oswald, respecting the King's Intention of treating fairly and keeping faithfully the Conventions he should enter into, of which Disposition he should give at the Treaty convincing Proofs by the Fidelity and Exactitude with which he should observe his Engagements with his present Allies; and added, that the Points which the King had chiefly in View were *Justice* and *Dignity*; these he could not depart from. He acquainted M^r Grenville that he should immediately write to Spain and Holland, communicate to those Courts what had passed and request their Answers; that, in the mean Time he hoped M^r Grenville would find Means of amusing himself agreeably, to which he should be glad to contribute; that he would communicate what had passed to the King; and he invited him to come again the next Day.

On our Return M^r G. expressed himself as not quite satisfied with Part of M^r De Vergennes's Discourse, and was thoughtful. He told me that he had brought two State Messengers with him, and, perhaps, after he had another Interview with the Minister, he might dispatch one of them to London: I then requested Leave to answer, by that Opportunity, the Letters I had received from Lord Shelburne and M^r Fox; he kindly promised to acquaint me, in Time, of the Messenger's Departure. He did not ask me to go with him the next Day to Versailles, and I did not offer it.

The coming and going of these Gentlemen was observed, and made much Talk at Paris; and the Marquis de la Fayette, having learnt Something of their Business from the Ministers, discoursed with me about it. Agreeable to the Resolutions of Congress, directing me to confer with him and take his Assistance in our Affairs, I communicated to him what had passed. He told me that during the Treaty at Paris for the last Peace, the Duke de Nivernois had been sent to reside in London, that this Court, might, through him, state what was from Time to Time transacted in the Light they thought best, to prevent Misrepresentations and Misunderstandings. That such an Employ would be extremely agreeable to him on many Accounts; that, as he was now an American Citizen; spoke both Languages, and was well acquaint-

ed with our Interests, he believed he might be useful in it; and that, as Peace was likely, from Appearances, to take place, his Return to America was, perhaps, not so immediately necessary. I liked the Idea and encouraged his proposing it to the Ministry. He then wished I would make him acquainted with Mess^{rs} Oswald and Grenville, and, for that End, proposed meeting them at Breakfast with me, which I promised to contrive if I could, and endeavor to engage them for Saturday.

Friday morning, the 10th of May, I went to Paris and visited M^r Oswald. I found him in the same friendly Dispositions, and very desirous of doing good, and of seeing an End put to this ruinous War. But I got no farther Light as to the Sentiments of Lord S. respecting the Terms. I told him the Marquis de la Fayette would breakfast with me Tomorrow, and, as he, M^r Oswald might have some Curiosity to see a Person who had in this War, rendered himself so remarkable, I proposed his doing me the same Honor. He agreed to it cheerfully. I came home intending to write to M^r Grenville, whom I supposed might stay and dine at Versailles, and, therefore, did not call on him. . . .

The Gentlemen all met accordingly, had a good deal of Conversation at and after Breakfast, staid till after one O Clock and parted much pleased with each other.

The Monday following I called to visit M^r G. I found with him M^r Oswald, who told me he was just about returning to London. I was a little surprised at the Suddenness of the Resolution he had taken, it being, as he said, to set out the next Morning early. I conceived the Gentlemen were engaged in Business, so I withdrew, and went to write a few Letters, among which was. . . [one]. . . to Lord Shelburne, being really concerned at the Thought of losing so good a Man as M^r Oswald.

Source

The Emerging Nation: Foreign Relations of the United States, 1780–1789, Volume I, Mary A. Giunta, Editor-in-Chief, pp. 376–379; Washington, D.C.: 1996

NA: PCC, item 100, v. 1, pp. 357–358, 402–410, and 413–414 (Transcription); M247, reel 127.